NUMB. LXV.

The GUARDIAN.

—Inter ſcabiem tantam & contagia— Hor.

Tueſday, May 26. 1713.

THERE is not any where, I believe, ſo much Talk about Religion, as among us in *England*; nor do I think it poſſible for the Wit of Man to deviſe Forms of Addreſs to the Almighty, in more ardent and forcible Terms than are every where to be found in our *Book of Common Prayer*. And yet I have heard it read with ſuch a Negligence, Affectation, and Impatience, that the Efficacy of it has been apparently loſt to all the Congregation: For my part I make no ſcruple to own it, that I go ſometimes to a particular Place in the City far diſtant from my own Home, to hear a Gentleman, whoſe Manner I admire, read the Liturgy. I am perſwaded Devotion is the greateſt Pleaſure of his Soul, and there is none hear him read without the utmoſt Reverence. I have ſeen the young People who have been interchanging Glances of Paſſion to each others Perſon, checked into an Attention to the Service at the Interruption which the Authority of his Voice has given them. But the other Morning I happened to riſe earlier than ordinary, and thought I could not paſs my time better than to go upon the Admonition of the Morning Bell to the Church Prayers at ſix of the Clock. I was there the firſt of any in the Congregation, and had the Opportunity, however I made uſe of it, to look back on all my Life, and contemplate the Bleſſing and Advantage of ſuch ſtated early Hours for offering our ſelves to our Creator, and prepoſſeſs our ſelves with the Love of Him, and the Hopes we have from Him againſt the Snares of Buſineſs and Pleaſure in the enſuing Day. But whether it be that People think fit to indulge their own Eaſe in ſome ſecret, pleaſing Fault, or whatever it was, there was none at the Confeſſion but a Sett of poor Scrubs of us, who could Sin only in our Wills, whoſe Perſons could be no Temptation to one another, and might have, without Interruption from any Body elſe, humble, lowly Hearts, in frightful Looks and dirty Dreſſes, at our Leiſure. When we poor Souls had preſented our ſelves with a Contrition ſuitable to our Worthleſſneſs, ſome pretty young Ladies, in Mobbs, popped in here and there about the Church, clattering the Pew Door after them, and ſquatting into a Whiſper behind their Fans. Among others one of Lady *Lizard*'s Daughters, and her hopeful Maid, made their Entrance; the young Lady did not omit the ardent Form behind the Fan, while the Maid immediately gaped round her to look for ſome other devout Perſon, whom I ſaw at a Diſtance very well dreſſed; his Air and Habit a little Military, but in the Pertneſs not the true Poſſeſſion of the Martial Character. This Jackanapes was fixed at the end of a Few with the utmoſt Impudence, declaring, by a fixed Eye on that Seat, (where our Beauty was placed) the Object of his Devotion. This obſcene Sight gave me all the Indignation imaginable, and I could attend to nothing but the Reflection, that the greateſt Affronts imaginable are ſuch as no one can take notice of. Before I was out of ſuch vexatious Inadvertencies to the Buſineſs of the Place, there was a great deal of good Company now come in. There was a good number of very Janty Slatterns, who gave us to underſtand, that it is neither Dreſs or Art to which they were beholden for the Towns Admiration. Beſides theſe, there were alſo by this time arrived two or three Setts of Whiſperers, who carry on moſt of their Calumnies by what they entertain one another with in that Place, and we were now altogether very good Company. There were indeed a few, in whoſe Looks there appeared an Heavenly Joy and Gladneſs upon the Entrance of a new Day, as if they had gone

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gone to Sleep without Expectation of it. For the ſake of theſe it is worth while, that the Church keeps up ſuch early Mattins throughout the Cities of *London* and *Weſtminſter*; but the Generality of thoſe who obſerve that Hour, perform it with ſo taſteleſs a Behaviour, that it appears a Task rather than a voluntary Act. But of all the World, thoſe familiar Ducks, who are, as it were, at home at the Church, and by frequently meeting there, throw the time of Prayer very negligently into their Common Life, and make their coming together in that Place as ordinary as any other Action, and do not turn their Converſation upon any Improvements ſuitable to the true Deſign of that Houſe, but on Trifles below even their Worldly Concerns and Characters. Theſe are little Groups of Acquaintance diſperſed in all parts of the Town, who are, forſooth, the only People of unſpotted Characters, and throw all the Spots that ſtick on thoſe of other People. Malice is the ordinary Vice of thoſe who live in the Mode of Religion, without the Spirit of it. The pleaſurable World are hurried by their Paſſions above the Conſideration of what others think of them, into a Purſuit of Irregular Enjoyments; while theſe who forbear the Gratifications of Fleſh and Blood, without having won over the Spirit to the Intereſts of Virtue, are implacable in Defamations on the Errors of ſuch who offend without reſpect to Fame. But the Conſideration of Perſons whom one cannot but take notice of, when one ſees them in that Place, has drawn me out of my intended Talk, which was to bewail that People do not know the Pleaſure of early Hours, and of dedicating their firſt Moments of the Day, with Joy and Singleneſs of Heart, to their Creator. Experience would convince us, that the earlier we left our Beds, the ſeldomer ſhould we be confined to them.

One great Good which would alſo accrue from this, were it become a Faſhion, would be, that it is poſſible our chief Divines would condeſcend to pray themſelves, or at leaſt thoſe whom they ſubſtitute would be better ſupplied than to be forced to appear at thoſe Oriſons in a Garb and Attire which makes them appear mortifyed with wordly Want, and not abſtracted from the World by the Contempt of it. How is it poſſible for a Gentleman under the Income of fifty Pounds a Year, to be attentive to ſublime things? he muſt riſe and dreſs like a Labourer for a ſordid Hire, inſtead of approaching his Place of Service with the utmoſt Pleaſure and Satisfaction, that now he is going to be Mouth of a Crowd of People, who have laid aſide all the Diſtinctions of his contemptible Being, to beſeech a Protection under its manifold Pains and Diſadvantages, or a Releaſe from it by his Favour who ſent them into it. He would, with decent Superiority, look upon himſelf as Orator before the Throne of Grace, for a Crowd, who hang upon his Words, while he asks for them all that is neceſſary in a tranſitory Life, from the Aſſurance that a good Behaviour, for a few Moments in it, will purchaſe endleſs Joy, and happy Immortality.

But who can place himſelf in this View, who, though not pinched with Want, is diſtracted with Care from the Fear of it? No: A Man in the leaſt Degree below the Spirit of a Saint or a Martyr, will loll, huddle over his Duty, look confuſed, or aſſume a Reſolution in his Behaviour which will be quite as ungraceful, except he is ſupported above the Neceſſities of Life.

Power and Commandment to his Miniſters to declare and pronounce to his People, is mentioned with a very unregarded Air, when the Speaker is known in his own private Condition to be almoſt an Object of their Pity and Charity. This laſt Circumſtance, with many others here looſely ſuggeſted, are the Occaſion that one knows not how to recommend to ſuch as have not already a fixed Senſe of Devotion, the Pleaſure of paſſing the earlieſt Hours of the Day in a publick Congregation. But were this Morning Solemnity as much in Vogue, even as it is now at more advanced Hours of the Day, it would neceſſarily have ſo good an Effect upon us, as to make us more diſengaged and chearful in Converſation, and leſs artful and inſincere in Buſineſs. The World would be quite another Place than it is now the reſt of the Day, and every Face would have an Alacrity in it, which can be borrowed from no other Reflections, but thoſe which give us the aſſured Protection of Omnipotence.

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